



June 8, 2009

Via Electronic File

The Honorable Michael J. Copps
Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein
Commissioner Robert M. McDowell
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

RE: American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) National Broadband Plan (GN Docket No. 09-51)

Honorable Acting Chairman and Commissioners:

We represent a regional coalition (the "Coalition") of public entities from the City of Houston and Harris County, Texas, whose sole purpose is to serve the public interest. The Coalition appreciates this opportunity to provide comments to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Members of the Coalition have a vested interest in the deployment and accessibility of broadband services for all residents. Specifically, we seek to ensure that the FCC's National Broadband Plan will benefit the more than 400,000 residents living in underserved communities across our region.

We believe the following recommendations to be vitally important for consideration by the FCC in formulating the National Broadband Plan and as part of its consultation with the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the Department of Commerce in their implementation of the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP):

The Coalition recommends that the FCC, when considering the definition of “underserved area”, should evaluate the speed and capacity, usefulness, affordability, accessibility, and net neutrality of available Internet services. We believe that these factors will help to qualify projects that are focused on increasing broadband adoption in impoverished communities across the United States. Assisting these communities will further the purposes of the ARRA by using broadband funding to create jobs, promote economic recovery and to assist those most impacted by the recession.

The Coalition recommends that the FCC, when considering affordability, utilize established poverty guidelines¹ and any expanded eligibility criteria allowable under the ARRA in a manner consistent with the practice of other federal agencies such as the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Coalition recommends that FCC, as part of its consultation with NTIA, encourage NTIA to:

Maintain a nationally competitive process in its consideration of the role of State agencies in the BTOP grant selection process. We recommend that the BTOP grant process is not strictly an intra-state competition, so that the opportunity for nontraditional but effective ways of making broadband accessible to all underserved communities is realized.

Ensure that qualified institutions serving underserved and vulnerable populations are eligible for grants for expanding public computer center capacity in addition to community colleges and public libraries.

Ensure that the qualification criteria of private entity grant applications are consistent with the public interest goals of the Act. Though we recognize the value of private entities in the effective delivery of broadband services, we believe that governments and non-profit organizations have the unique purpose and capacity to act in the public interest as their primary mission.

Broadband serves as an engine of economic growth, enabling communities to develop and expand job-creating businesses and institutions; but, where broadband is inaccessible because it is unaffordable or lacks the speed and capacity necessary to functionally transfer information, the nation as a whole, and our region in particular, lag behind in the global marketplace. Large urban regions like ours have an extraordinary challenge to reduce digital inequities that contribute to educational barriers, unemployment and underemployment, and a continuous cycle of poverty.

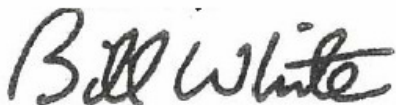
The FCC, in its development of the National Broadband Plan, should give special consideration to a plan that will provide broadband access, with the greatest speed, to the greatest number of people, particularly those who are low income. Additionally, consideration should be given to the fact that public entities collaborating with their local partners are uniquely positioned to have

the greatest impact toward making broadband accessible to the underserved communities in the nation's fourth most populous city.

In furtherance of our purpose to serve the public interest, the Coalition endorses the Comments of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA), as filed. We respect the due diligence of the FCC and appreciate the diverse public positions that the Commission must consider. We urge the FCC to sincerely consider our recommendations in its development of the National Broadband Plan and its consultation with NTIA on the BTOP grant program.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, please feel free to contact Houston Mayor Bill White's office at 832-393-1000 or via email at mayor@cityofhouston.net. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of the NATOA comments and the recommendations outlined above.

Sincerely,



Bill White
Mayor, City of Houston



Ed Emmett
County Judge, Harris County



John E. Sawyer, Ed.D
County School Superintendent
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